

## Incoherent, Strategy-devoid Syrian Bombing Policy

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As expected, Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced a decision by the government to participate in airstrikes on ISIS strongholds inside Syria. But what was less expected was the decision — taken at the same Cabinet meeting and announced at the same press conference — to accept an additional 12,000 Syrian refugees, along with spending \$A44 million supplying 240,000 refugees with “cash, food, water and blankets” in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan.



***Whatever you say, Washington!***

The cost to Australia of accepting these additional refugees — almost doubling the projected intake for the year — has been estimated at around \$A700m over the next four years.

To be sure the decision to take in the extra refugees and provide additional humanitarian support was welcomed by most Australians — even many of those who hitherto might have been anti-immigration or opposed to such largesse on purely economic grounds — and it has bi-partisan support. The decision however to join the bombing fray may not be as enthusiastically received.

In response to Abbott's declaration — made presumably to justify the decision and offset anticipated criticism — that the legal basis for the air strikes is “the collective self-defense of Iraq,” Independent MP Andrew Wilkie said dropping bombs on Syria would be “illegal, ineffective and dangerous”. Regardless, Wilkie almost certainly will be echoing what is likely to be the reaction of a significant number of Australians once the reality of the decision takes root in the public consciousness — especially in the wake of the decision to accept the increased refugee intake.

Wilkie added the following: “These air strikes just won't work. You can't defeat an unconventional enemy like Islamic State by dropping bombs.”

Even before Abbot's decision, in a recent [article](#) published in the Australian Financial Review, Geoff Winestock reported that neither the U.S. nor Australia can expect the end the war in Syria while they oppose both sides in the conflict. Now for many this might be a no-brainer, but Winestock's observations nonetheless bear repeating, since logic has never been highly prized much less frequently invoked in either Washington's or Canberra's responses to the so-called "war on terror."

What makes Winestock's observations compelling is that he was reporting on his recent [interview](#) with Australian Jeremy Salt, author of the book *The Unmaking of the Middle East - A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands*. Salt is a former journalist turned academic, and is currently professor of politics at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey.

Salt's view - tendered a couple of days earlier - is as pessimistic as it is unsettling. In commenting on the possibility that the Australian government - under the auspices of its relentlessly unquestioning alliance with the U.S. - will join in the bombing of ISIS strongholds inside Syria's borders, he says, "the push by the Abbott government for bombing Islamic State might be a nice token of our commitment to U.S. alliance, but it is practically useless and ... could make Australians more of a target for terrorists."

Along with more broader considerations from other sources, we will return to Salt's summation of the situation shortly. But it should be noted that the refugee crisis is reaching levels not seen since Adolf Hitler blew his brains out in the Berlin Bunker at the end of World War Two. We are witnessing a perpetual motion catastrophe in the making that was inescapably underscored recently by the sight of a young Syrian refugee boy Aylan Kurdia's body washing up on a Turkish beach. Folks here in Australia and elsewhere are beginning to seriously question the "wisdom" of this nonsensical, unnecessary and pointless war.

As Ben Eltham from alternative Aussie news-site New Matilda [reported](#), "What can explain the outpouring of grief and compassion that those photographs have provoked, except the extraordinary power of those images? Certainly we knew, or should have known, about the perils of refugee movement and the horror of the Syrian civil war. But somehow, perhaps understandably, it had been easy for too many to look away."

If there is any lasting good that might come from this little boy's tragic death, it may manifest itself not just in a more compassionate response both in Australia and elsewhere to the refugee crisis - clearly the single biggest catalyst underpinning the government's decision to substantially increase the refugee intake - but a greater awareness of the factors which have led us all to this point. For it is those factors that far too many folks found it easy to "look away" from. In reality, it could well be argued we have been doing that since America's decision to invade Iraq in 2003.

Although precipitated by the Arab Spring of 2011, the Syrian civil war is one that had its genesis in the years leading up to 9/11. Like Iraq, Libya and Yemen, it is another recurrent exercise by America's neoconservatives and liberal interventionists in creating further mayhem and chaos in the Greater Middle East in the absence of any coherent, logical framework for doing so.

Australia's prime minister is, like most of his predecessors, ready, willing and able to do Uncle Sam's bidding regardless of the strategic logic, much less the morality or legitimacy under international law. Some time ago, he reinforced his own and probably the bulk of the Australian population's limited understanding of both the nature and the history of the conflict by describing the Syrian war as one being fought between the ["The US Hand in the Syrian Mess"](#) and